



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Workshop

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts.

EDITED BY
I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

VOL. V.

NO. 9.

ON THE ORNAMENTATION OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE.

By JACOB FALKE.

When we apply ourselves to trace the historical development of ornamentation in the time of the Renaissance, we cannot fail to perceive in its leading and prevailing principles, similar ideas to those which still obtain in modern art. We desire now to direct our efforts to the raising of ornamental art from its present depressed condition by an examination and thorough search into its inherent principles, and to bring the form and decoration, i. e., the whole style into harmony with those peculiarities and requirements which result from the material employed and the destination intended, making whatever the past can hold out to us in the way of perfection, serve for example and instruction. We desire also a reform, a regeneration, as in the time of the Renaissance, which indeed the name itself indicates; only the issue and the means were different. If we endeavour to find the ground work in the things themselves, so also did the Renaissance aim at a regeneration of ancient art, at first simply depending rather on sight and feeling, with but insufficient knowledge, but later, with more scientific and archæological research, by rule and measure.

This is also now the chief point of view in which to regard ornamentation. The revival of the antique ornamentation is here the object and forms the very essence of the development. Fortunately, however, the artists of the Renaissance had not especially in view a regeneration of ancient art in the same sense as the architects of the present day, whose aim appears to be to force back our ways of life, our necessities and our whole individual existence into the unvaried art forms of the old world, just as if they would fit the body to the dress and not the dress to the body. Those artists rather adapted the antique forms to the desires and

necessities of the times, and so became the creators, regenerators and founders of a new style of art. The task was a difficult one, but they surmounted it. They acted like the learned men of the same period, who made the writings of the Greeks and Romans the foundation of all literary and scientific education, but added to them another, namely, modern science.

It was perhaps also a fortunate thing, that at the beginning of the Renaissance movement in the fourteenth century, the fresh impulsive life of Italian art, which was ever struggling for development and new conformations, had not to encounter an archeological and scientific acquaintance with antiquity and its art, which would have crippled its youth and necessarily produced mere imitations. The knowledge of ancient art was in an especial degree fragmentary, and was obliged to be gathered up and combined out of the fragments of antiquity, which were certainly at hand in rich abundance, and which were dug out of the earth, almost day by day as soon as their value was recognised. In small pieces, covered with earth, overgrown with all kinds of weeds, they rested in the bosom of the earth like seed, ready to spring up into new life and fruitful increase. And these remains belong, almost without exception, to the later Roman period of ancient art, and very little, more especially in the matter of ornament, to the Grecian epoch. They are consequently not distinguished by purity and strictness of form, but perhaps for this very reason, since they supply this deficiency by a greater richness of motive, a more luxuriant development of ornamental life, and a greater leaning to the natural, they were only so much the better fitted to contribute to that struggle for development and new expression of form to which we have before alluded.

But that which presented itself in such a fragmentary manner from the ancient Roman art, was seized upon with the greatest ingenuity, and freely applied with the most delicate sentiment of beauty by the Italian artists, first of all perhaps on account of its beauty, yet by no means without a certain connexion with the classical movement into the literary and scientific provinces of art. United to the most delicate perception of the natural, and as its every production testifies, a desire for completeness of detail, and a childlike delight in its own work, there was created, at this period of the Renaissance, an ornamental style, which claims the foremost rank as to charm and loveliness, as well as to genuine perception of beauty and due appreciation of the means available for its purpose, among the finest creations of all times in the same sphere of art, a style which without disclaiming its origin from the antique, yet makes a peculiar and independent impression in a much higher degree than that of the most flourishing period of the Renaissance. This last, instead of developing itself in a freer, richer, and more original manner, together with the architecture of the same time, approached more and more severely to the antique forms, in proportion as the knowledge of ancient art increased and the writings of Vitruvius were published, examined and extended. I will not however anticipate the development.

It is difficult to fix precisely on the time from which the Renaissance dates its commencement, i. e., when that first more or less conscious return to the antique element of art took place, which led directly to the style which is peculiar to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The difficulty lies not in the scarcity of information about these times, but in the subject itself.

When two inquirers have struck into the same path, but in opposite directions, the one taking for his starting point ancient art, and antiquity itself, in order to prosecute his research into the rise and fall of classical art and its motives during the middle ages; while the other, on the contrary, begins with the Renaissance, in order to trace its first and most ancient sources, it will happen that they pass one another on their way. So is it indeed; the surviving and almost extinct elements of the antique in the middle ages indicate how closely upon them the influence of the recovered and renewed antique, if we may call it so, begins. Hence it happened that though isolated attempts to invigorate and enliven mediæval art by means of the antique were of earlier date, they had not till then any permanent influence. To this time belongs the sculpture of Nicolo Pisano with its partly antique, partly realistic tendency. Even the thirteenth century was not without such attempts, just as Dante, notwithstanding his plunge into all the depths of the mysticism of the middle ages in his *Divine Comedy*, was the precursor of the humanities of the old classics, and if he cannot be considered as the pilot, he must be recognised as the first explorer into this path.

There is then one entire period, during which the traces on both sides become confused and almost effaced, and other elements appear which have intruded into the

path of the development of Italian art. We mean the Gothic, which forms perhaps but an episode in Italy and is not a necessary step in her development as it was to the North of the Alps, still an episode of the highest significance. (Fig. 1). In this period, the time at which Giotto flourished, elements of the most varied character are found in closest juxtaposition, as in the sculptures which surround the porches, or in the painted ornaments of the vaulted roofs which decorate the ribs and frame the paintings in the panels of the vault. For example, while one of the mouldings with its geometrical, mosaic-like ornaments recalls the Byzantine decoration, another is surrounded with a scarcely recognisable Gothic acanthus, while between them a band holds the running ornament of the acanthus scroll in a form which shows that the antique motive has again been taken up anew. Another important reminiscence of the antique, which lasted till the fifteenth and even into the sixteenth century, is the stone mosaic which is found in richer and richer application both in pavements and wall decoration. Some merit of this belongs indeed to antiquity, but rather the art itself and its application than its ornamental style. While the geometric style in which it clothes the walls of the Churches and Baptisteries, as well as the surfaces of the ecclesiastical articles, clearly demonstrates their Byzantine origin, the charming arabesques of the chequered pavements belong to the most beautiful remains of the orientalised ornaments of the Romanesque period. This mosaic work with its grand and noble application was destined to bend before the rapidly growing colors of the Renaissance, and to succumb to them, and yet it was Giotto, the first introducer of this style of painting, who, in the decoration of his belfry on the Cathedral of Florence, has made the most magnificent use of the Mosaic.

If we leave out of sight Nicolo Pisano, and other less important insulated attempts, it is perhaps Pietro di Giovanni Tedesco, who, in the plaster decorations on the framework of the second South door of the Cathedral of Florence, was the first to give a clear expression to the new forms of the Renaissance. This work was executed in the last years of the fourteenth century, so that we perceive that it was in Tuscany and Florence, the cradles of the Renaissance, that its first traces are seen, and that in this province of art it was sculpture which led the way. It may be that the spirit of the Renaissance may have shown symptoms of life at an earlier period as extricating itself from the stiff forms of the Byzantine in Giotto's paintings, but it did not obtain its real expression, till sculpture recognised the importance of the naked human figures in its ornamentation. This was quite natural, for the objects which gave the first impetus to the Renaissance, the remains of ancient art, were all the works of the sculptor, such as altars, sarcophagi, door posts, friezes, capitals etc., covered with relief ornaments, generally in Roman style.

Pietro di Giovanni Tedesco was a German by birth and flourished somewhere about the year 1386. It is therefore no wonder that in his works the Gothic orna-

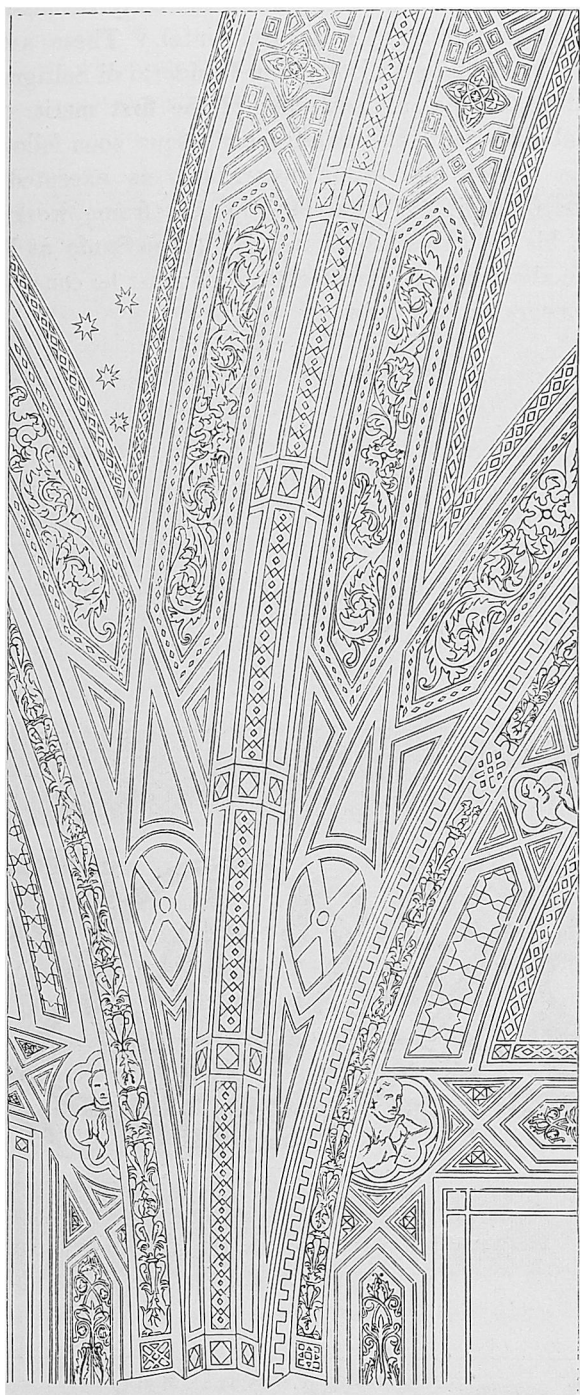


Fig. 1. Painted ornament of vaulted roof by Giotto.

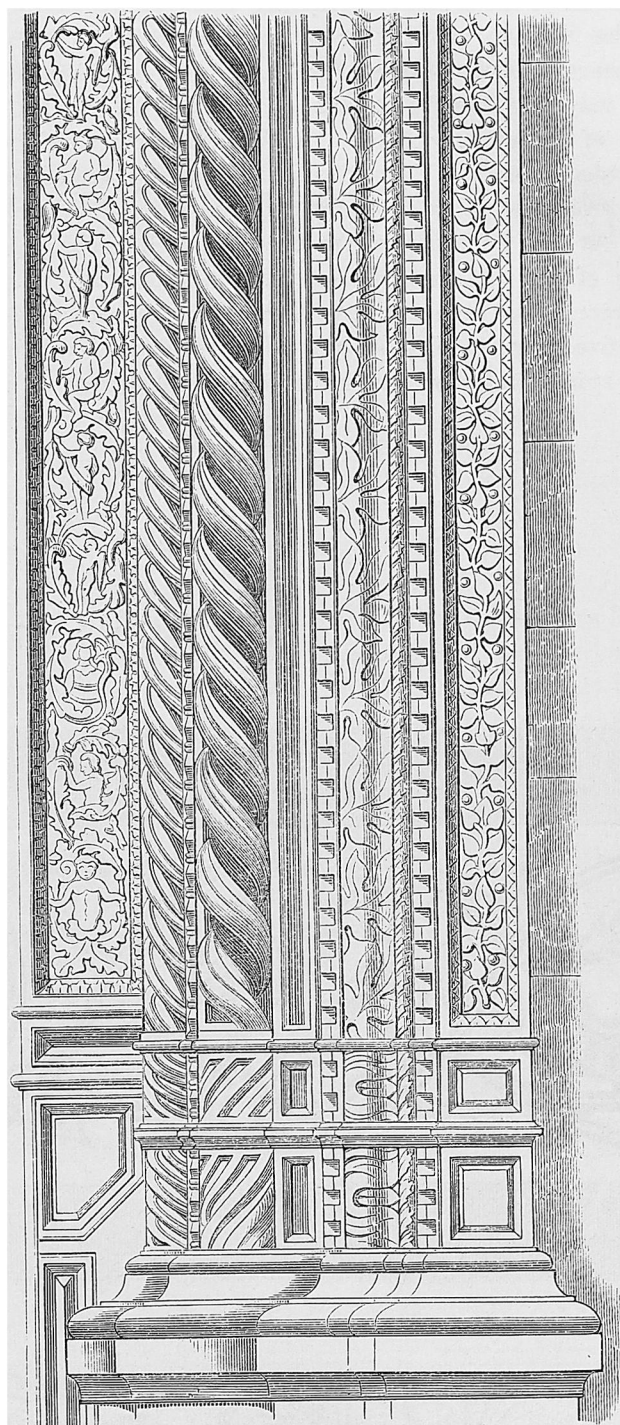


Fig. 2. Transition ornament, by Pietro di Giovanni Tedesco.

ment still holds its sway, and even predominates, approaching however the new Renaissance element very closely. On the porch mentioned above are seen rounds and hollows with Gothic foliage and crockets on the side of a panel ornament, with an almost naturalistic ivy scroll, while in the midst of the foliage, as in the German Mediæval ornament, disport all kinds of natural and fantastic animals and figures. Close to these almost foreign elements for Italy, stands out a stem with the acanthus foliage wound round it, and an acanthus scroll twines itself in the panel of one of the pillars, disclosing in the midst of its involutions naked figures of winged

children, some of whom are playing musical instruments. In this manner the characteristic peculiarities of the succeeding style of ornament are at least indicated; the first beginnings of profiting by ancient remains, more spirit and freedom in the treatment and choice of the objects, the introduction of naked children, and lastly, the more naturalistic treatment, which together with the antique element exerted such a powerful influence on the ornamentation of these great masters who came next in succession. The colleagues or pupils of Pietro, Nicolo of Arezzo, for example, followed still more decidedly in the same direction. While the statues of Nicolo were

more lifelike, the heads more full of expression and individuality, his ornaments partake more of the character of the antique models, or at least yield to its greater influence without however the least suspicion of imitation. We may cite the framework of the door of the Cathedral of Florence, opposite the Via di Servi which was executed in 1408. Even this is not by any means quite free from the spirit of mediæval times.

At this period, however, we see already the beginning of the action of those great artists who, mostly sculptors and architects at once, entirely freed the decorative ornamental side of art from the mediæval form and spirit, and produced ornaments of such freedom and

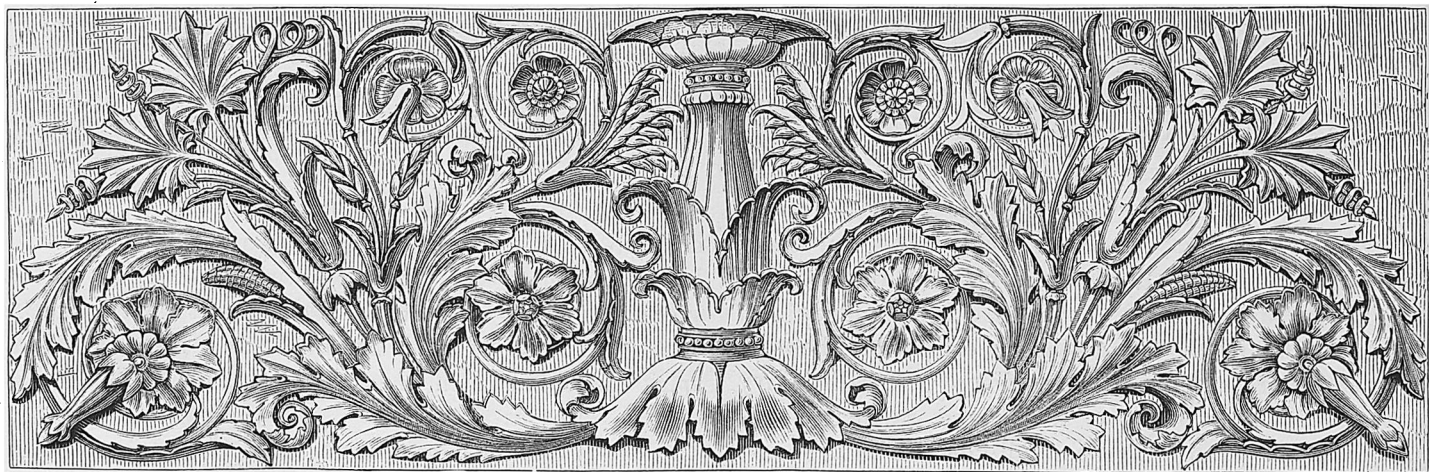
delicacy, of such exuberance in embellishment, that they made the art of the period, that of the early Renaissance prominently decorative and ornamental. These artists were Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, Desiderio di Seltignano, Luca della Robbia, all sculptors of the first merit. The pictorial ornament, the painted arabesque soon followed, both as border and frame decoration, as executed by Benozzo Gozzoli, for example, in the frame work inclosing his fresco-paintings in the Campo Santo at Pisa, but the above named great statuary must be considered the pioneers of the style.

(To be continued in the next number.)

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1.



No. 2.

No. 1. Carved and painted Ornament in Wood from Norway.

No. 2. Terra Cotta Frieze between Corinthian Capitals from the University Buildings in Pesh.